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The Southern Frontier

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Easing Our Inter-Regional Tensions

By Emeric Kurtagh
(*Head Resident, Kingsley House, New Orleans*)

Signs of Tension

There are today signs of an increasing tension between the two major regions of our country—North and South. Perhaps it might be more accurate to describe this tension as one between two cultural patterns or two sets of folkways rather than between two geographic areas.

This tension has serious implications affecting our unity as a nation now at war and later in the postwar period. Conflicts have arisen in different parts of the country—North as well as South. If the present tensions are permitted to continue, we may see more outbreaks of disunity and violence.

For the purposes of the present discussions, one might ignore the violent outbreaks that occurred in Detroit, Beaumont, Mobile, and New York, and consider rather the steady and subtle undercurrent of tension that is present wherever conflicting folkways and cultural patterns meet. The exigencies of war have enlarged tremendously the area in which there is an uncontrolled interplay of these different folkways and have thereby increased the areas of potential conflict.

The war has presented us with the problem of migration on an unparalleled scale. Millions of our military personnel are being shifted around the country, often followed by their wives and families. War workers move in tremendous numbers between far off places. Groups of teachers, social workers, nurses, and other professional workers, numerically small but important, are also part of this migration.

The unprecedented migration between regions has great potentialities for good or for evil. Every in-migrant is an unofficial ambassador of good will or ill will, as the case may be. This twentieth century movement of masses of which he is a part may lead to a greater understanding between our regions and a greater unity of our country as a nation. Or it may lead to a sharpening of differences and a period of intolerance and disunity. No one can know which one of these extreme outcomes, if either, will prevail, but it might be very valuable for groups who believe in educational programs designed to increase inter-regional understanding and to interpret our conflicting folkways. Such programs of education might well affect the eventual outcome of this problem.

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Causes of Tension

Some of the causes of friction and tension between our regions, especially between the North and South, are: 1) attitudes toward the Negro: segregation, discrimination, withholding of political and civil rights, denial of economic and educational opportunities; 2) attitudes of the Negro toward segregation, discrimination, etc.; 3) attitudes toward the family, education, church, class, place of women; 4) attitudes toward work and work habits, planning, invention, originality; 5) attitudes toward government, law, unwritten law, justice, politics. This list could be extended considerably, but it will suffice to show the wide range of divergent attitudes and folkways with which we are dealing.

Regional Handbooks

It is perfectly understandable that exposure to the folkways of the South will produce dismay and antagonism among newcomers from other parts of the country. But almost any person, once given an opportunity to understand the background of southern ways, the whys and wherefores of southern behavior, will develop a more effective relationship to the South. Sometimes I wonder if our war leadership —which had the foresight to develop special pamphlets for our servicemen going abroad, instructing them in the ways of England, North Africa, or Australia— could develop similar materials for the use of our troops going South. Civilians on the move also might well use some similar handbooks.

Bringing about a better understanding between our two major regions would call for educational statesmanship on a giant scale. And it should be remembered that this job of interpretation ought to cut both ways: explaining the South to the North and the North to the South.

Community Leadership

There is another and somewhat more limited problem: the problem of leadership in southern communities or other communities where the job of day-to-day leadership has to be performed against a backdrop of tenseness and prejudice. There are many professional workers in southern cities who come from other parts of the country. They represent what might be called "imported" leadership. The vast majority of these voluntary emigres are sincerely enthusiastic about the vast potentialities of the Southland and its significant place in the future of America. Temporary or permanent residents of the South, they are eager to contribute to the healthy growth of these regions and to their integration with the rest of the country.

Workers' Dilemma

In the peculiar position they occup in their respective communities, these workers are often beset with doubts and perplexities. They ask themselves such questions as these: Can I do a good job as a specialist in my field without actively taking sides in general community problems? What should be my role in relation to the controversial issues of my community? How far can I go in cultivating positive and accepting attitudes toward my community and its folkways without actually strengthening and confirming them? How can I stay on the side of the line beyond which the habit of making concessions may become an occupational disease?

In trying to find a level which affords both personal satisfaction and professional effectiveness, leadership has a difficult road to travel. At the one extreme are those who withdraw to an attitude of isolationism. At the other extreme are those who practice mimicry to the point where they identify themselves completely with their new community, including its most extreme folkways. And in between are the great majority of workers making accommodations of one kind or another.

Leadership Training

There are several national agencies, public and private, which select and appoint workers for important posts in the South. In most cases, such workers are not given any special preparation to meet the peculiar problems and tensions of the South. Of course there is always the opportunity to learn by the method of trial and error, the hard way. But there are many more who experience failure or frustration. It seems to me that important gains could be made by a plan that would provide special preparation and training for workers who are to function in south-

(*Continued on Page* 4)

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To attain through research and action programs the ideals and practices of equal opportunity for all peoples in the region.

Editorial

The "Sharecroppers Country"

The National Sharecroppers Fund was established in 1943 in an effort to help the agricultural workers, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers of the South through acquainting the nation with the problems of the nine million people directly affected by the marginal nature of southern agriculture and through supporting those movements working toward the economic and social emancipation of these agricultural workers. The "Magna Charta for Southern Agriculture" published elsewhere in this issue is the Fund's statement of objectives for attacking the "sharecropper system" at its roots while providing land for the returning landless soldier. In attaining these objectives NSF hopes to do more than deal fairly with the returned soldier, as is contemplated by the "GI Bill of Rights." It hopes to erase a great historic blot upon the economic record of American democracy.

The increasing landlessness of the Southern rural population has been greatly accelerated by the War. State governments and chambers of commerce have shown great concern over the impending disaster that awaits a region so dependent upon the soil for its survival. Some of these agencies are advocating and advancing plans for ameliorating these conditions, which plans, along with the "Magna Charta," should invite constructive thought and action.

But over and above the problems of agricultural commodities and infertile soil are the pressing problems of people in the region who are being disinherited by the demands of war, the technological changes, and the social pressures of poverty, illiteracy, race, and coercion. It is fairly certain that all of the farm hands who went to the wars will return to farm under the pre-war system of agricultural insufficiency. It is to be doubted that the rural workers who moved down to the coastal cities of the South to build ships and perform day laboring tasks will return to the soil from which they stemmed. And if the protests similar to one appearing in the Charlotte, North Carolina, *Observer* continue, it is evident that the old system of racial exploitation in agriculture will receive a severe shaking. The protest was a simple one. The Negro schools of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, were closed for cotton picking. The white schools were not closed. The correspondent stated, "I feel that all of us should help in every possible way to relieve the situation for the benefit of all concerned, but should it be one-sided?"

The needed reformation in southern agriculture must not be one-sided. Owners, managers, and tenants, government, banker, and operator, whites and Negroes, all have a tremendous stake in this situation. The only constructive, effective answer is to be found in ways that develop, conserve and use to the fullest the human and natural resources of the region. We need not continue a "grapes of wrath" type of agriculture. We need not continue breeding a region of landless farmers.

The Cotton Textile Workers

They work at a bewildering variety of jobs. They are doffers, slubber tenders, rovers, spinners, slashers, tie-in-girls, weavers, loomfixers, loop cutters, sweepers, bleachers, dyers, and a hundred other familiar things.

Basically, however, they do two things, today as two thousand years ago. They spin the cotton fibres into thread, and they weave the thread into cloth.

Four out of five of them live and work in the South, the rest being mostly in New England.

The nationality pattern is tremendously variegated. In New England, the French Canadians are most numerous, filling the bulk of the jobs, with a top layer of Yankees and Scotch-English holding down the more skilled jobs by virtue of having got in on the ground floor in the last century. Other nationalities crop up thickly in certain places: Poles in Massachusetts and Connecticut; Portugese in New Bedford and Fall River; Italians in Utica, N. Y., and throughout Rhode Island. In the South, this variety yields to perhaps the most complete homogeneity of any major group of working people in the country. Almost all the Southern textile workers are old-line Americans from our last great reservoir of pure Anglo-Saxon stock—the hill districts of the Southeast Piedmont. There are at present only a handful of Negroes in the Southern mills, nearly all of them in low-paid custodial jobs.

Whatever their nationality, all of them, Northerners and Southerners alike, live and work in the two classic "depressed areas" of the United States: the have-seen-better-days New England manufacturing towns, and the not-quite-yet-developed industrial areas of the South. It is also significant that most of them are not to be found in the big metropolitan centers of these regions, but in the "back country" or in smaller cities which tend to be self-contained communities where the textile mills are the only important industrial enterprise.—*"The Story of the Cotton Textile Workers." Textile Workers Union of America.* 1944.

A Magna Charta for Southern Agriculture*

WE PROPOSE that every veteran of the armed services who shall have been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable shall have the right, subject to reasonable tests as to his ability and experience as a farmer, to government aid in securing ownership of a fairly-valued, "family size" farm. The size of such farm will vary in different localities, according to the conditions of the soil, crops, and climate, but in every case the measure will be the ability of the farm, under careful cultivation, to support adequately a family. The inclusion of every item of labor-saving machinery necessary in the operation of the specific farm is envisaged.

WE PROPOSE that the purchase be financed by an appropriate public agency, either through direct loan or through total government guarantee of any loan contracted through ordinary commercial channels. Cheap credit not to exceed four per cent per annum and long-term amortization privileges of not less than twenty years are contemplated.

WE HOLD IT ESSENTIAL that there be no discrimination on account of race, creed, or color, and specifically between Negro and white, in the administration of these benefits.

**Proposed by the National Sharecroppers Fund and subscribed by 65 distinguished citizens.*

Some Questions and Answers

Do you think Negroes have the same chance as white people in this country? Sixty per cent of the whites living in the South said "Yes"; 37% said "No"; 85% of the Negroes believed that their race has unequal opportunities.

These opinions were the result of a nation-wide population sample of public opinion obtained by the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Denver. Persons covered by this poll believed, among other things, that some white people dislike Negroes because of their race and color; some look down on them as inferior; some believe Negroes do not have the capacity to take advantage of educational and economic opportunities; some, that Negroes lack ambition and initiative; some, that the Negro's own aggressiveness is a handicap; some, that Negroes have as good a chance as they deserve; and some, that whites don't like to mix and associate with Negroes.

One person reported: "Negroes are not supposed to have an equal chance to make a living. The Bible says they're the white man's slave."

FROM THE PRESS

Amendment No. 3

To the Editor of The News-Age-Herald:

Why add another amendment to the constitution when we ignore the provision which requires that the basis of representation should be adjusted every 10 years to conform to the changes in population as shown by the census? It is a shame that the people of Jefferson County should humbly and dumbly submit to be defrauded of their rights in this matter.

Some are afraid that white supremacy will be endangered if this amendment No. 3 is made. Instead of attempting to deprive the Negro of his constitutional rights as a citizen by every kind of chicanery, equivocation, evasion and pettifogging device that our magnanimous lawmakers can contrive, we should encourage every citizen, white or black, rich or poor, to take part in political affairs to insure the general welfare. The broader the base, the steadier and stronger the structure.

The Negro population is less than 50 per cent in any Southern state. It is extremely improbable that they will vote solidly and as a unit in any state election in support of any party or policy, even where Negro interests are directly concerned. It used to be supposed that all Negroes would vote only as Republicans. Recently Negroes have attempted to vote in Southern Democratic primaries and have been excluded from them.

In national affairs, the Negro minority is about one-tenth of our total population. It is absurd to suppose that this Negro minority can endanger and nullify the will of the much more numerous white population who are better educated, richer and occupy a position of overwhelming dominance in the courts, in political affairs, in the business world, in social organization and are firmly established by long existing custom.

Bret Hart's Truthful James inquires:

"Do I dream, do I doubt or are visions about?
Is civilization a failure, or is the Caucasian played out?"

We say: No.

We can gratify the laudable ambition of the Negro for full citizenship without the slightest danger to the established order, political or social.—Archibald Leishman. —*Birmingham News*, November 5, 1944.

Not Subject to Law

John M. Daniel, the attorney general, ruled that the primary election the other day to name a successor to the late Hamp P. Fulmer was not an election within the meaning of South Carolina's state law requiring liquor stores to be closed on "election days."

The election was, of course, a primary election and since the general assembly repealed all of the primary laws in an effort to prevent the federal court from holding that Negroes must be allowed to participate in the primaries, presumably primary elections are no longer elections within the meaning of the state laws. It remains yet to be seen whether the special session will actually prevent the Supreme Court's deciding that Negroes may not participate in the extra-legal primaries which South Carolina is now holding.

Already, by the attorney general's opinion, it has succeeded in leaving liquor stores open for primary election days. This probably doesn't matter much now since there isn't very much liquor for sale in South Carolina but it may be significant after the war.—Columbia, South Carolina, *Record*, November 10, 1944.

Our Health Department

Bleckley County now has a fine new Health Center, with facilities for both white and colored residents. The new Health Center opened this week and is certainly the pride of all Bleckley County.

The new offices, the equipment and furnishings were made possible by the City of Cochran, the County Commissioner, several civic organizations but more particularly by the hard work and determination of the County Nurse, Mrs. Richard Parramore, and her able assistant, Mrs. Bryant Williams.

Mrs. Parramore and Mrs. Williams deserve the thanks of all and both deserve full credit for the new Health Center. This is another example of what can be done to improve our community and county if only we have the DETERMINATION and the AMBITION to really do things and not assume the "business as usual" attitude and become the victims of procrastination.—Cochran, Georgia, *Journal*, October 26, 1944.

The President Speaks

The future of America, like its past, must be made by deeds—not words.

America has always been a land of action—a land of adventurous pioneering —a land of growing and building.

America must always be such a land.

The creed of our democracy is that liberty is acquired and kept by men and women who are strong and self-reliant, and possessed of such wisdom as God gives to mankind—men and women who are just, and understanding, and generous to others—men and women who are capable of disciplining themselves.

For they are the rulers and they must rule themselves.

I believe in our Democratic faith and in the future of our country which has given eternal strength and vitality to that faith.—*Franklin D. Roosevelt speaking in Chicago, Illinois, October*, 1944.

Two More Lynchings

The record has been stained by two recent lynchings. On November 3 Robert Lee, a Negro who had fatally assaulted Arthur Harris, Troup County, Georgia, jailer, was shot to death by a civilian member of a posse near Rock Mills, Alabama. His slayer claimed that when he overtook Lee, the Negro turned to throw a large rock at him, so that he was obliged to shoot in "self defense."

At Pikeville, Tennessee, on November 23, James I. Scales, young Negro trusty at the Tennessee Training and Agricultural School, who was accused of slaying the daughter and wife of the superintendent of the institution, was removed from the county jail and shot to death by a small group of white men on the grounds of the reformatory. Governor Prentice Cooper immediately announced that "there will be a full investigation of both the murder and the lynching," and offered a reward of $500 for arrest and conviction of the lynchers.

Negroes Ask for Postgrad Funds

The State Board of Regents has been asked to make it possible for graduates of the three state colleges for Negroes to pursue post-graduate and professional work at universities which award higher degrees . . .

The petition, signed jointly by H. M. Bond, of Fort Valley State College; Aaron Brown, of Albany State College, and Benjamine F. Hubert, of Georgia State College at Savannah, asked the regents to adopt the principle that they "are liable to provide such opportunities for Negroes as are now provided for white persons."—*Atlanta Journal*, November 21, 1944.

The Chicago Round Table

"We have seen that the color-line problem is a recent problem—not one of long standing in human history. It is a social problem which has become an international problem.

"The problem is urgent now, we think, because of the improvement in communication, the shift in industrial power, and the use of color-line propaganda by great powers in our modern world. It is, therefore, a matter of intense urgency for the American people to think constructively and to strive diligently for further improvements in the matter of race relations and color discrimination within the United States. Only as we solve the problem locally—that is, within our own country—can these United States of America make their maximum contribution in international relations throughout the world."—*Ernest C. Colwell, vice-president of the University of Chicago, closing the Round Table's discussion of "Peace as a World Race Problem." Chicago. August* 20, 1944.

Freedom: Promise or Fact*

By ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

IF I WERE a Negro today, I think I would have moments of great bitterness. It would be hard for me to sustain my faith in democracy and to build up a sense of goodwill toward men of other races.

I think, however, that I would realize that if my ancestors had never left Africa, we would be worse off as "natives" today under the rule of any other country than I am in this country where my people were brought as slaves.

In a comparatively short period of time the slaves have become free men—free men, that is, as far as a proclamation can make them so. There now remains much work to be done to see that freedom becomes a fact and not just a promise for my people.

I know, however, that I am not the only group that has to make a similar fight. Even women of the white race still suffer inequalities and injustices, and many groups of white people in my country are the slaves of economic conditions. All the world is suffering under a great war brought about because of the lag in our social development as against the progress in our economic development.

I would know that I had to work hard and to go on accomplishing the best that was possible under present conditions. Even though I was held back by generations of economic inequality, I would be proud of those of my race who are gradually fighting to the top in whatever occupation they are engaged in.

I would still feel that I ought to participate to the full in this war. When the United Nations win, certain things will be accepted as a result of principles which have been enunciated by the leaders of the United Nations, which never before have been part of the beliefs and practices of the greater part of the world.

I would certainly go on working for complete economic equality and my full rights under a democratic government. I would decide which were the steps that I felt represented my real rights as a citizen and I would work for those first, feeling that other things such as social relationships might well wait until certain people were given time to think them through and decide as individuals what they wished to do.

I would not do too much demanding. I would take every chance that came my way to prove my quality and my ability and if recognition was slow, I would continue to prove myself, knowing that in the end good performance has to be acknowledged.

I would accept every advance that was made in the Army and Navy, though I would not try to bring those advances about any more quickly than they were offered. I would certainly affiliate with the labor movement because there is the greatest opportunity for men to work side by side and find out that it is possible to have similar interests and to stand by each other, regardless of race or color.

I would try to remember that unfair and unkind treatment will not harm me if I do not let it touch my spirit. Evil emotions injure the man or woman who harbors them so I would try to fight down resentment, the desire for revenge and bitterness. I would try to sustain my own faith in myself by counting over my friends and among them there would undoubtedly be some white people.

*Reprinted by permission from the *Negro Digest*, (5619 South State Sa., Chicago, Ill.) Vol. I, No. 12, October, 1943.

The Urban League Resolves

The National Urban League at its Annual Convention held in Columbus, Ohio, September 28-October 3, resolved that:

"The South, while *economic problem* number one, also is *economic opportunity* number one, and is destined to play an increasingly larger role in national affairs. Four out of five Negro Americans still live in southern and border states where the Negro's social problems are found in their most acute form. War-time migration has intensified in other regions racial tensions and social maladjustments which may be traced back to southern origin.

"We believe that basic attempts to meet the social welfare problems facing American Negroes must be based upon preventive, constructive work in the area from which the problems stem.

"We affirm, therefore, our recognition of the need for increased attention to the social problems of Negroes in the South; and urge the development and execution of plans for increased service by the National Urban League to that area."

Edward L. Bernays Award

In February, 1945, the Race Relations Department of the Federal Council of Churches will award to an American citizen, white or Negro, whose efforts in the race relations field have been outstanding, the Edward L. Bernays Award consisting of a Series E, $1,000 war bond and an engrossed scroll.

The purpose of the award is to focus public attention upon constructive, cooperative efforts to remove racial tensions and conflicts and to insure better personal and group relations between white and Negro people of the United States.

The judges are: Virginius Dabney, Editor of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, Richmond, Virginia; Dorothy Canfield Fisher, author, Arlington, Vermont; William H. Hastie, Dean of Howard University Law School, Washington, D. C.; Leslie Pinckney Hill, President, Cheyney Training School for Teachers, Cheyney, Pennsylvania; and Samuel M. Lindsay, Economic Advisor of the Harmon Foundation and Professor Emeritus, Columbia University, New York City.

A Young People's Institute

The Young People's Institute of the Universalist Convention of North Carolina was held in June at Shelter Neck, N. C. After discussing the racial situation, the members "unanimously r e s o l v e d and pledged themselves:

"1. To speak with respect of all races and creeds and to discard the use of the word 'nigger.'

"2. To seek acquaintance with the cultural and scientific contributions of great Negroes. (Suggested reading Negro Newspapers—The Pittsburg Courier, the Crisis, The Norfolk Journal, The Afro-American. Read biographies of great Negroes.)

"3. Support political and government issues that will provide better economic and educational opportunities for Negroes.

"4. Treat all persons and groups with appropriate consideration and use terms of courtesy and respect.

"5. To keep these items before ourselves by publishing them in the Tar Heel and the Christian Leader and by sending copies to each member of the Institute.

"6. The unanimous vote to stand as an individual pledge for the carrying out of these resolutions."

Miss Fisher Resigns

Miss Margaret L. Fisher, who joined the staff of SRC on June 1 as Director of Public Relations, has resigned her position. She is now working with the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. Her address is 939 Piedmont Avenue, N. E., Atlanta, Georgia.

Easing Our Inter-Regional Tensions*

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ern communities. The purpose of such preparation would be to equip the worker with certain fundamental insights and understandings and assist him in organizing these understandings in relations to his job. Some of the elements that would help to build the necessary insights and understandings are: a study of autonomous groups; a study of the social and economic backgrounds of the South; a study of history and psychology of the South; and a careful analysis of workers' own attitudes and prejudices.

In the course of this training it might be well to emphasize to the workers that inter-regional tension is not confined to the North-South impasse, but is a many-faceted affair involving, for example, cultural differences between the Far West, the Midwest, and the East, as well. If the problem can be presented as one concerned with harmonizing the relations of all these regions, the old misunderstanding between the North and the South might well be overcome, as it were, on the flank.